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## THE FARM LABOR OUTLOOK FOR 1919.

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The farm labor outlook for 1919 must be considered in the light of conditions that existed during peace times, the removal of men from the farms for military and industrial purposes during the war, the extent of future agricultural production, the extent to which men will be released from the army and industries, and the opportunities and inducements to be offered to farm help.

*Agricultural Production—1919.*—The need for men on American farms will depend on the extent to which production is to be carried on. The Secretary of Agriculture in his Annual Report for 1918 states that, "The first year of our participation in the war, 1917, witnessed the nation's record for acreage planted—285,000,000 of the leading cereals, potatoes, tobacco and cotton, as against 261,000,000 for the preceding year, 251,000,000 for the year prior to the outbreak of the European war, and 248,000,000 for the five-year average, 1910–1914. This is a gain of 22,000,000 over the year preceding our entry into the war and of 35,000,000 over the five-year average indicated. Even this record was exceeded the second year of the war." There was planted in 1918 for the same crops 289,000,000 acres, an increase over the preceding record year of 5,650,000. While the acreage planted in wheat in 1917 was slightly less than that for the second year of 1915, it exceeded the five-year average (1910–1914) by 7,000,000, and the acreage planted in 1918 exceeded the previous record by 3,500,000. The acreage planted during the current fall season reaches 49,027,000, exceeding all previous records.

The acreage of farm crops that farmers will plant in 1919 is, of course, problematical. It is evident that the spirit of patriotism, the guaranteed price for wheat, a fixed price for hogs and high prices that were almost assured for other farm products, and the unusually favorable conditions during the spring for seeding and planting, are responsible for the large acreage in 1918. If the weather conditions for planting should be unfavorable in the coming spring, a material reduction in acreage must necessarily take place. Also, the stability of prices for farm products will be more or less in doubt and will influence to some extent the planting program. On the other hand,

prior to 1914, production in the United States was not keeping pace with consumption. Each year saw a material decrease in the amount of farm products exported to other countries. In fact, large imports of agricultural products were made by this country. During the war, there has been an increase in the population of the United States. The markets of the entire world have been opened for American products. It is almost assured that a large and urgent demand from European countries for foodstuffs will continue for one year or more. For these reasons, therefore, it would seem that American farms should maintain the maximum of production. Again the individual American farm can be compared to a manufacturing plant. It will be most profitable when it is operated to its maximum capacity. Instead of reducing acreage or production, it will be desirable from the farmer's standpoint to maintain maximum yields, and thus secure the largest financial returns. In this connection, of course, it is understood that many farmers who have planted land to grain crops year after year during the war in order to meet the demand for foodstuffs will now, since farming is to be restored to a peace time basis, place these lands in the regular rotation and seed them with other than grain crops. This readjustment of crops in the return to a basis for a profitable, permanent agriculture is sure to reduce in some degree the acreages of grain crops.

For a long time prior to the war, American farms have experienced a shortage of labor. In answer to the plea of the Department of Agriculture and agricultural colleges for a better cultivation of crops, keeping of live stock, spraying of trees, saving of fruit and the fixing up the home and the home grounds, farmers have replied that they recognized the practicability and desirability of all the claims but that they did not have sufficient capable help to do the work.

Industries and professions in the cities have offered opportunities and many times large cash returns to men of the farms with the result that there has been a large and continuous movement of people from the country to the city.

The acquiring of new lands for farms in practically every state has gone forward at a rapid rate. Efficient farm laborers have been encouraged to become tenants or land owners. The number of farms has materially increased while the number of farm laborers has failed to make a proportionate growth.

Information furnished by the War Department shows that more than four million men have been mobilized for military purposes. It is estimated that 25 per cent. of this body came from the farms. In

other words, American farms furnished to the military service more than one million men. Careful estimates also indicate that for every man taken from the farms into the Army one and one-half men went from the farms into war industries. This means a total loss of two million five hundred thousand from the farms during the period of the war. To meet this handicap caused by lack of regular or permanent farm labor, retired farmers have been pressed into service, boys, men and women from the cities have assisted, and larger machinery and labor saving equipment have been used. While farmers have been willing to get along and handle the work in this way and with such help as could be had, they realize the urgent need of skilled men to assist in carrying on the work. The aim should be to establish on the farms a large supply of regular and permanent farm help.

"Will a sufficient number of men be returned from the Army and war industries to meet the needs of agricultural production this coming spring?"—is a question prominently before the agricultural people. Already strong demands have been made upon the War Department to release from the Army at once all men interested in food production. The demobilization of all camps in the United States is proceeding in a rapid way and the larger number of men undoubtedly will be released by spring in sufficient time for the regular farm work.

With reference to the Army in France, considerable time will elapse before any large number of these men will be demobilized before peace is declared. It has been announced that one and one fourth million men have been chosen for occupational duties. Again, we know that in the case of past wars the demobilization has been somewhat slow. A statement in a recent number of the *Literary Digest* shows that demobilization in the case of the Russian-Japanese War required thirteen months; the Boer War, ten months; Spanish-American War, sixteen months; Turko-Russian War, eighteen months; Franco-Prussian War, twenty-eight months, and our Civil War, seventeen months.

While the United States government has been accomplishing an unusual feat during the war, it is evident that owing to the distance troops must be transported, and other uses for the shipping, that some reasonable length of time will be required to return the troops from over seas. There is little reason to believe that peace terms can be arranged before spring. Therefore, the larger number of men to be demobilized after that time will hardly be available until well into the summer or fall.

The manufacture of war materials and equipment is being curtailed and in a majority of plants stopped. Ship building is proceeding but with many less men than used prior to the signing of the Armistice. The work of the building and equipping of cantonments and other war plants has been abandoned. From these lines many thousands of men have been released to return to their former occupations and to enter other industries.

On the other hand, industrial and manufacturing plants engaged in manufacture of peace time products will give all possible employment. The government, states, counties and municipalities are starting large public projects, such as buildings and roads, for the purpose of utilizing the services of available workers.

The return of labor to the farm will be governed by the opportunities and inducements that can be offered in the way of wages, homes and chance for advancement from laborer to tenant and from tenant to land owner.

It is not reasonable to expect that the farms will pay the same cash wage that is now being paid in the industries. The farm offers, in addition to a cash wage, a home and large share of the living, an opportunity to acquire land, and a place in society that is not found in the cities.

It will be desirable for farmers to continue to offer a fair wage for labor and to provide satisfactory living accommodations for farm help. There is an urgent need for more tenant homes where married men can live in reasonable comfort. The old shack or bunk-house does not satisfy these people and will not hold them on the farm. Neat, well-built, well-located and comfortable tenant houses will attract men with families and hold them in the country.

Plans too that will offer high class laborers an interest in the farm business and which will aid them in securing not only a fair return for their labor, but a chance to become tenants or land owners will mean much in solving the labor problem.